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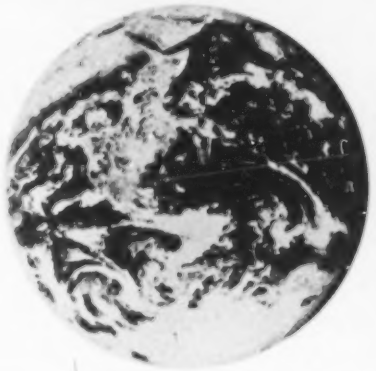
FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL OPINION BALLOT REPORT



SEPTEMBER 1989

Results of 38,536 opinion ballots submitted by 4,694 participants in the Foreign Policy Association's nationwide Great Decisions study and discussion program offer special perspectives not only for Washington policymakers but for all those interested in foreign policy issues. The participants, who cast their ballots between January and July 1989, include a significant percentage of community leaders. Some 66 percent have college or advanced degrees. And they are from all regions of the country. The states which submitted the largest number of ballots are Oregon, California, Washington state, Illinois, Arizona and Pennsylvania.

*The **National Opinion Ballot Report** was prepared by Helmut Norpoth, professor of political science at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and a former consultant to the New York Times/CBS News Poll.*

*Ballots are part of the **Great Decisions 1989** briefing book, prepared by the editors of the national nonpartisan Foreign Policy Association. The 96-page book includes impartial background and analyses of eight critical foreign policy issues facing the U.S. More than 250,000 Americans joined in study and discussion of the eight topics. This is the 35th year of the nationwide Great Decisions study and discussion program, the largest citizen education program of its kind in the country.*

Highlights

Nuclear deterrence, one of the cornerstones of American defense policy, is considered ethically acceptable — without reservations — by less than one third of respondents to the Great Decisions 1989 Opinion Ballots; only slightly more than a third consider it very effective in advancing U.S. interests.

The participants were virtually unanimous, however, in advocating a stronger role for the United Nations as a means of protecting U.S. interests in such spots of high international tension as the Persian Gulf; and in favoring neutrality in relations with Iran and Iraq, whose war has now been ended.

Strong support was also expressed for transferring the management of Latin American debt from the U.S. Treasury to an international agency and for multilateral rather than unilateral U.S. actions in world politics. Many respondents favored a faster pace in the arms reduction negotiations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, seeking deeper cuts of each side's military forces. There was little inclination to go slow in fostering ties with China, but the Chinese crackdown on the pro-democracy movement may have come after most participants had sent in their ballots. Regarding the problem of combating drug use, participants did not see U.S. military interdiction or aid to producer countries as highly effective.

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Topic 1: Ethics in International Relations Power and Morality

Participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed, agreed with reservations or disagreed that certain key policies were ethically acceptable. Few agreed without reservations that armed intervention and covert action were ethically acceptable. A larger number — but far short of a majority — felt nuclear deterrence and economic sanctions were ethically acceptable. Overall, participants registered ethical misgivings about policies largely framed in military or punitive terms. Some comments suggested that participants were far more comfortable with "conflict resolution and UN peacekeeping."

In part, ethical misgivings mirrored doubts about the effectiveness of the policies presented to participants. A majority considered armed intervention and covert action as not very effective or as not effective at all. That was not the case for nuclear deterrence and economic sanctions. But even here, only 35% rated the nuclear option as very effective. Comments on this question indicated that perhaps diplomacy should have been listed instead. "None of those policies is as good as diplomatic negotiation and support of the UN," wrote one participant.

Issue A. The U.S. relies on a number of policy instruments, some of which are listed below. For each, check whether you agree, agree with reservations or disagree that the policy is ethically acceptable.

	agree	agree with reservations	disagree
Nuclear deterrence	32%	41%	27%
Armed intervention	9%	45%	45%
Covert action	13%	46%	41%
Economic sanctions	38%	48%	14%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 across rows because of rounding.

Issue B. How would you rate the following policies in terms of their effectiveness in advancing U.S. interests?

	very effective	somewhat effective	not very effective	not effective
Nuclear deterrence	35%	41%	13%	11%
Armed intervention	8%	36%	34%	22%
Covert action	6%	36%	33%	24%
Economic sanctions	14%	44%	29%	13%

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Topic 2: The Persian Gulf Reassessing the U.S. Role

A year ago American warships patrolled the Persian Gulf to secure the flow of oil, which was threatened by the Iran-Iraq War. Asked whether or not the U.S. should be prepared to use force when it comes to protecting American interests in that area, a majority of participants (61%) did reply "yes." Still, a much larger majority, virtually reaching unanimity (94%), said that strengthening the role of the United Nations was the way to protect American interests. "Cooperation with the Soviet Union" also enjoyed widespread support (86%). Definitely out of favor with the participants was selling advanced arms to moderate Arab states, an option some respondents amended to read, "also do not sell to Israel." Overall, international cooperation rather than military action seemed to be most popular in the balloting.

On the question of how to deal with two nations rating near the bottom of U.S. esteem, Iran and Iraq, few participants seemed to have any difficulty making up their minds. Almost all of them preferred the U.S. to stay neutral toward the two nations, which until recently were engaged in an especially savage war. Several participants, however, were not above showing their contempt for both with remarks like "let them kill each other," or "nuke them both."

Issue A. When it comes to protecting American interests in the Persian Gulf, the U.S. should:

Be prepared to use force	61%
Sell advanced arms to moderate Arab states	24%
Strengthen the role of the UN	94%
Cooperate with the Soviet Union	86%

Issue B. With regard to relations with Iran and Iraq, the U.S. should:

Favor Iran over Iraq	2%
Stay neutral	93%
Favor Iraq over Iran	5%

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Topic 3: Latin American Debt Living on Borrowed Time?

The crushing debt burden of the Latin American countries is a case where three classical strategies of action compete for attention. One is the free-enterprise approach of letting Latin American governments work out the problem with their (North American) bank creditors. Another is case-by-case management involving the U.S. government, as detailed in the Baker Plan. A third is shifting responsibility for debt management to an international agency like the World Bank. Confronted with these three options, most participants selected the "international" option. But a sizeable group favored case-by-case management under U.S. auspices, whereas only a small minority preferred the free-enterprise approach. Quite a few of that minority, however, amended their response by complaining that the "U.S. should NOT bail out the bankers who have encouraged loans."

Asked about specific courses of action to solve the debt problem, a large majority opted for the ability-to-pay alternative: 64% preferred allowing Latin debtors to service their debts according to their ability to do so. Only a quarter of the participants favored the more drastic remedy — from the point of view of U.S. banks, that is — of forgiving the region's debts, while only one in ten favored the more drastic remedy — from the perspective of the debtors — namely of making Latin debtors pay up no matter what the social and political costs. Some of those pleading for debt forgiveness commented that the "U.S. failed many nations by allowing them to borrow beyond a reasonable ability to repay." Others recommended a debt-for-nature swap — to "trade off debt for a piece of the Amazon rain forest" — thereby solving not only a financial crisis but also an environmental crisis.

Issue A. With regard to Latin American debt, the U.S. should:

Leave debt problem for the Latin American governments and their creditor banks to work out	12%
Continue the case-by-case strategy of debt management as outlined by the Baker Plan	40%
Transfer responsibility for debt management from the U.S. Treasury to an international agency under the auspices of the World Bank	48%

Issue B. Which of the following statements comes closest to your thinking?

Latin American debtors should be held responsible for all the debt no matter what the social and political costs	10%
Latin American debtors should service their debts according to their ability to do so	64%
Some or all of the region's debts should be forgiven	26%

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Topic 4: Arms Agreements: Too Little Too Late, or Too Much Too Soon?

Rarely in the past 40 years have the signals from Moscow sounded as encouraging for the prospect of disarmament as in the last 12 months. The Soviet Union has taken several steps on its own, away from the bargaining table, to withdraw troops and armor from East European countries. What is the U.S. to do with such an opportunity? Offered four alternatives on strategic arms ranging from "proceed cautiously," as the Bush Administration seems to be doing, to "unilateral steps toward nuclear disarmament," an option somewhat outside of the Washington mainstream, none received the support of a majority of participants. While one third favored the proceed-cautiously option, the remaining two thirds were divided among various alternatives envisioning farther-reaching action: 29% advocated deeper reductions than those called for by the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks; 22 % favored unilateral steps, and 14% wanted to work more rapidly toward a START agreement. Advocates of unilateral steps frequently spiced their answers with comments like, "producing as many nuclear weapons as there are is absurd — look it up," or "the number of nuclear weapons is asinine."

A preference for deep cuts in strategic arms was not counterbalanced by a desire to maintain or strengthen conventional arms. On the contrary, here, too, a majority either favored deeper cuts on both sides (43%) or unilateral American reductions (19%). The alternative closest to the Bush Administration's policy of seeking deep cuts in Warsaw Pact forces in exchange for modest cuts in NATO forces enjoyed only modest support, with the buildup of conventional forces receiving the least support.

Issue A. On strategic arms, the U.S. should:

Proceed cautiously before concluding a START treaty	35%
Work toward rapidly concluding a START agreement	14%
Work toward deeper reductions than those called for by START	29%
Take unilateral steps toward nuclear disarmament	22%

Issue B. On conventional arms, the U.S. should:

Seek deep cuts in Warsaw Pact forces in exchange for modest cuts in NATO forces	28%
Seek deeper cuts in Warsaw Pact forces in exchange for deep cuts in NATO forces	43%
Build up conventional capability	10%
Make unilateral reductions in conventional forces	19%

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Topic 5: China Redefining the Revolution

The June 3-4 crackdown of the Chinese government on the pro-democracy movement took place after many **Great Decisions 1989** participants had discussed U.S. policy toward China. Eight in ten respondents either supported an increase of economic and cultural ties while limiting defense cooperation or an increase of ties across-the-board. "Arms to China," so one commented, "are loose cannons on the deck" One participant, who noted that the ballot had been cast "after Chinese massacre," belonged to the minority who did not favor expanded ties.

In large numbers, however, participants saw Chinese policies, such as arms sales to the Third World and the treatment of Tibetans and other minorities, as obstacles to improved U.S. relations with China. The Taiwan issue also loomed large as an obstacle, and so did protectionist trade policies of the U.S. On the other hand, China's one-child policy and the warming of Sino-Soviet relations did not worry many.

Issue A. The primary goal of U.S. policy toward China should be:

Increase ties with China across-the-board	29%
Increase economic and cultural ties but limit defense cooperation	61%
Maintain the current level of relations	10%
Reduce ties to China	1%

Issue B. Do you consider the following constitute obstacles to improved U.S. relations with China?

U.S. protectionist trade policies	68%
The Taiwan issue	71%
China's treatment of Tibetans and other minorities	78%
China's arms sales to the Third World	80%
China's improving relations with the Soviet Union	22%
China's one-child policy	15%

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Topic 6: Farmers, Food and the Global Supermarket

In surveying a number of aspects of the farm-and-food issue, **Great Decisions 1989** participants placed the highest importance on global land management and environmental protection. The average rating of this item on a 10-point scale, with 1 being low in importance and 10 high, was 8.3. Closely behind were two other global items, namely global population control and the elimination of hunger worldwide. By contrast, the survival of the American family farm received a 6.8 rating, the lowest among the alternatives offered.

On the question of subsidies for American farmers, opinion was divided without majority support for any particular policy. One third favored elimination of such subsidies outright, while another third supported the use of subsidies as a bargaining tool to get other countries to relax their trade restrictions. The remaining third largely favored continued subsidies as long as they did not interfere with international trade.

Issue A. On a scale of 1 - 10, where 1 is low in importance and 10 is high, how important, in your opinion, is:

The survival of the American family farm	6.8
The promotion of free agricultural trade	7.1
The elimination of hunger worldwide	7.9
Global population control	8.0
Global land management and environmental protection	8.3
Reasonably priced and plentiful food for America	7.3
Emergency food aid for countries in need	7.3
Long-term development assistance for Third World countries	7.3

Issue B. With respect to its domestic farm policy and international agricultural trade, the U.S. should:

Give farmers subsidies or other Federal support regardless of the effect on international trade	8%
Give farmers subsidies or other Federal support as long as that does not interfere with international trade	25%
Use subsidies as a bargaining tool to get other countries to relax their agricultural trade restrictions	33%
Eliminate subsidies and other Federal support for farmers	34%

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Topic 7: Horn of Africa Empty Cornucopia?

There are few alternatives that struck participants as particularly effective in promoting U.S. interests in Ethiopia, a country that has experienced revolution, civil war and a widely reported famine under a Communist form of government. Still, the most effective one among not-too-effective choices was to seek Soviet cooperation to resolve the Eritrean war. Participants also judged the granting of development aid as somewhat effective, whether with strings attached, like improvement in the human rights situation, or not. Neither trade sanctions, nor withholding of aid, nor support for the Eritrean resistance received high ratings for effectiveness. "Stupid policies made us a fool," bemoaned one participant.

As for Somalia, the vast majority favored a policy of conditioning future aid for the Siad Barre government on improvements in human rights as opposed to withholding aid or giving it without strings. After all, as one commented, "we need friends in that area."

Issue A. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is low in effectiveness and 10 is high, how effective, in your opinion, is each of the following in promoting U.S. interests in Ethiopia:

Provide development aid to Ethiopia	6.3
Buy more Ethiopian products	4.8
Impose trade sanctions against Ethiopia	2.8
Withhold food aid from Ethiopia	2.5
Condition development aid on improvement in human rights situation	6.5
Support for Eritrean resistance	3.6
Seek Soviet cooperation to resolve Eritrean war	7.3

Issue B. What policy should U.S. follow toward Somalia?

Continue to give aid to Siad Barre government	12%
Condition future aid on improvement in human rights situation	78%
Withhold aid	10%

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Topic 8: International Drug Traffic An Unwinnable War?

Drugs, according to public opinion polls, now rank among the most important issues facing the country. Daily accounts of gang violence, murder, corruption and family breakdowns depict a harrowing scene of devastation, especially in inner-city America. What to do? There is little doubt among participants that the only effective policy (from among several offered) is drug education and treatment programs. Neither U.S. military interdiction nor U.S. aid to producer countries, policies tried by U.S. governments, were viewed as effective. Pressure on producer countries to halt supplies, however, was regarded as somewhat more effective. On the other hand, the radical proposal of legalizing drugs found little support as an effective means. Still, its potential effectiveness rated no lower than that of the tried policy of interdiction.

The exasperation with the drug problem showed in numerous comments volunteered by participants. More concern with "finding out *why* drugs were used" was urged by one. Another demanded that the "penalty for drug traffic should be serious," with a hint of what is administered in Asia, namely the death penalty. Yet another felt "the user must be made to pay the penalty of cold-turkey cure." This is certainly an issue not involving some abstract problem of foreign policy but a gut issue close to one's doorstep.

On a scale of 1 - 10, where 1 is low in effectiveness and 10 is high, how effective, in your opinion, is each of the following in combating illicit drugs:

Pressure on producer countries to halt supplies	5.8
U.S. military interdiction	4.2
U.S. aid to producer countries	4.3
Drug education and treatment programs in the U.S.	8.3
Legalization of drugs in the U.S.	4.2

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Characteristics of Participants

The 4,694 participants who mailed in their ballots are no cross section of the general public. Female participants outnumber males by a 3 to 2 margin. The majority is over 60 years old. The states with the largest number of respondents are (in that order): Oregon, California, Washington state, Illinois, Arizona and Pennsylvania. Two thirds hold college degrees, with advanced degrees quite common. Many would be considered "opinion leaders": one in seven indicated they were often asked for their opinions on foreign policy and half said this happened sometimes. A majority of the participants had been abroad during the past four years. And more participants indicated that participation in the Great Decisions program had changed their opinions than that it did not.

A. How many years have you participated in the Great Decisions program (that is, attended one or more discussion sessions)?

This is the first year I have participated	37%
I participated in one previous year	13%
I participated in more than one previous year	45%

B. Age

17 or under	3%
18-30	13%
31-45	7%
46-60	15%
61 or over	58%

C. Sex

Female	57%
Male	38%

D. Have you been abroad during the last four years?

Yes	51%
No	44%

E. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?

Some high school	5%
High school degree	6%
Some college	19%
College graduate	31%
Advanced degree	35%

F. How often are you asked for your opinion on foreign policy matters?

Often	15%
Sometimes	50%
Never	30%

G. Would you say you have or have not changed your opinion in a fairly significant way as a result of taking part in the Great Decisions program?

Have	44%
Have not	28%
Uncertain	22%

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100 because of missing responses.

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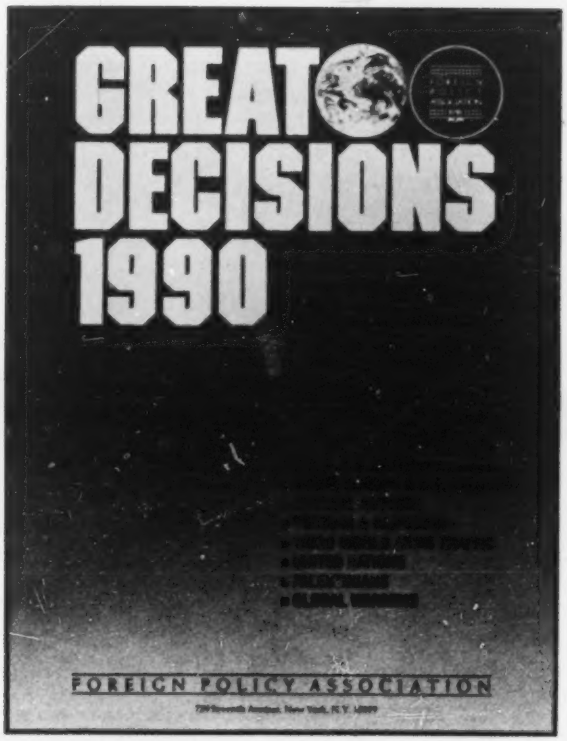

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